

Budget brings more taxes, more promises

Focus should be on performance

THE BNP-led government's first budget is just announced and we are hearing the initial reactions come in. In fact, the budget hasn't been fully analyzed and most responses are still being formulated which will be heard soon. Meanwhile, some of the more dominating elements of the Finance Minister Saifur Rahman's much discussed document seems immediately noteworthy.

Two elements are being most extensively discussed and both pertain to resource mobilization. Saifur Rahman has mentioned many times before that Bangladesh will have to learn to take care of its own expenditure and the days of waiting for foreign mercy to help the economy run is over. This means internal revenue collection and most of the buzz that is being heard is about this aspect.

As has been stated, one of the main pivots of this budget is the focus on taxation as the prime source of funds. This means enlarging the tax net as widely as possible. The objective is to bring in more people inside the net while providing incentives to the wealth generators at the same time. This was widely expected.

Expansion of tax base, reform of tax litigation settlement system, prevention of evasion, and creation of a tax-friendly environment conducive to investment are some of the main strategies to attain the objectives.

The declaration by the Finance Minister to depend on self-generated resources has met with positive comments. Addition to aid is one habit everyone wants to shun and aid itself is drying up anyway. So the realization will certainly be welcomed.

What however has met with some skepticism is the tax collection plan. While the Finance Minister has certainly increased the tax burden, it's not going to be popular unless the economic goods as promised, are delivered. This means more efficiency, less corruption and the rule of economic management by the principles of accountability and transparency.

In fact, the tax collection has been always lax and a higher level of collection could have been made even with the existing net. So the government will certainly have to deliver and that's where the real test lies.

The proposed tax regime is also observed by many quarters to be friendlier towards the well off than the poor and this will have to be explained or political implications may emerge. But before any conclusive comments are made we hope that the standard lessons of efficient management will be applied in this case as well and the burden of taxes will bring in something tangible in return and not just more rhetoric.

Nine more killed in road accidents

Its not carelessness, but a badly managed system

AT least nine people including six died on the spot in a grisly accident involving a Savar bound maxi on Thursday. It was hit by a runaway truck. Unfortunately, such a high number of road accident related deaths are rather common and will not raise too many eyebrows.

But this isn't a matter of worry over how the roads are managed but that of the entire traffic system especially that covering the highways. In fact, in no transport sub-sector is safety an issue that enjoys priority. Lack of rules and regulations, slack inspection and most of all unbridled entry and exit without any botheration about a systemic approach are the reasons that are causing this distressing situation.

However, this isn't about road safety only. It's also about the lack of capacity of the agencies and offices responsible for managing this sector as a whole. It begins with the basic standards required for road worthiness of vehicles to ensuring that road construction itself is in tune with highway traffic volume and required safety needs.

Men who can't be called role models for safe driving drive the passenger vehicles that ply on such roads. The owners also indirectly push them towards rash driving because profit motive rush more swiftly than anxiety for the passengers' lives and the gain of a few minutes for a few taka are worth a life or two. Those responsible for ensuring sanity in the entire scene on behalf of the government are always the most lax. Thus, there is an uncoordinated conspiracy of disregard and inefficiency that finally leads to such accidents and casualties.

Instead of piecemeal efforts, there should be focus on the entire sector so that it's not just a repair or two here and there but the health of the entire sector that is healed. Will somebody please pay attention?

Tripura, transshipment and passage to Chittagong



M ANWARUL HAQ

WHEN former Indian Prime Minister I.K.Gujral was asked in Dhaka why overland transit routes permitted by Delhi connecting Nepal with the Bangladesh border was not being allowed to function properly, he replied, "It is because of the mindset of the bureaucracy."

When former Indian Prime Minister I.K.Gujral was asked in Dhaka why overland transit routes permitted by Delhi connecting Nepal with the Bangladesh border was not being allowed to function properly, he replied, "It is because of the mindset of the bureaucracy."

In fact the problem of mindset grips us all in South Asia in varying proportions thanks to the legacy of the British Raj. While more than a million Indian and Pakistani soldiers train their guns against each other across their borders, it is seemingly the politicians who as policy makers give the handle to the bureaucrats to implement their mindset or at least carry out the set policies.

While South Asia, generally speaking, is mired in suspicions and conflicting thoughts there still is hope in distant corners that new avenues or openings could be made all to boost trade and to speed up and increase the movement of more cargo and more people.

At a seminar in Tripura organised jointly by that state's government and chamber last week, there were strong urgings that Bangladesh offer an access to Tripura's goods to enter either through transit or by

transshipment. Beginning from Tripura's Governor to its Chief Minister and a bevy of businessmen, strong appeals were made for a connection to Akhaura and onwards to Chittagong.

In reality the pleas of the Tripura political and business elite should be addressed to New Delhi because that is where the policy bigwigs take the decisions and from there such pleadings could be conveyed through diplomatic channels to Dhaka where our policy framers decide on issues of national and regional interest.

after decades of disruption. These include restoring the Benapole and Petrapole rail route where goods train move from one country to the other although locomotives are switched to the respective national colour when they enter another's territory. Transit facilities for India through the Bangladesh waterways continue to flourish for several years.

For more than two years a very effective bus service is operating between Dhaka and Calcutta. The regular bus service carrying passengers along with their limited

Subroom, a commercial centre of Tripura is situated only 75 kilometres from Chittagong port.

It was learnt that a previously proposed and agreed 12-kilometre railway line connecting Agartala and Akhaura will be constructed to benefit inter country rail traffic.

Many feel that tremendous opportunities for trade that exist due to geographical proximities and complementarities of the economies remain unexploited and untapped. The average annual trade volume between the Indian state and Bangladesh is now only around ten

The huge volume of goods that would pile up or be available for carriage through Bangladesh and export through containers from Tripura and its neighbourhood six other north-eastern Indian states by way of Agartala would have to be taken into consideration whenever an opening to Tripura is considered.

However, the modalities, although it could become multimodal in nature gradually, must be worked out to benefit both sides. The Indian side has often spoken of Bangladesh earning huge revenue

the point of stability and security, we should be assured of receiving the best cooperation of our neighbour, since when its goods are in transit through our territory it will also be in its interest to cooperate in the stabilisation process.

It may be mentioned that Bangladesh Commerce Ministry floated a proposal to establish a re-export scheme where certain items, like food could be re-exported from one part of India to another by transporting them through Bangladesh territory by opening of L/Cs. While allowing the use of Chittagong port for the north eastern states of India, Bangladesh perhaps could insist on following the re-export scheme between geographically separated divides.

Before embarking on the procedure of large-scale transshipment, the re-export scheme could be experimented. But it seems that down or up the line, either in the corridors of the NBR, the customs or political decision makers, the idea of re-export has got bogged down.

The re-export scheme must surface first. We must know the reaction of our neighbours to the re-export scheme after we decide ourselves. We can then decide through mutual discussions other avenues, other openings for new frontiers of cross-border communication between Bangladesh and India.

While the world is opening up in every direction, can we continue to live in isolation? One has to pay a price in sacrifice and hardship, have self sufficiency and surplus money for spending for living in isolation. But if there is more income generation, more connection, and more communication and with it more geo-political stability and security, it is better to remain connected.

Meanwhile leaders and traders of Tripura could have a friendly talk with New Delhi.

M Anwarul Haq is Diplomatic and Defence Correspondent of The Daily Star

ACCORD AND DISCORD

While the world is opening up in every direction, can we continue to live in isolation? One has to pay a price in sacrifice and hardship, have self sufficiency and surplus money for spending for living in isolation. But if there is more income generation, more connection, and more communication and with it more geo-political stability and security, it is better to remain connected.

However, the reality is that the issues of transit and transshipment have been on the agenda with or without public mention for several years now. However, knowledgeable circles say that the Indians have always tagged giving free market access as a supplement to getting transit or transshipment while Bangladesh wants the issue to be discussed on its own merit.

Most subject specialists feel that Delhi must recognise that as a gesture of good neighbourliness, as the bigger neighbour, it should provide Dhaka duty-free access on all 25-category of items of the previously agreed list and remove most of the existing tariff, para-tariff and non-tariff barriers to speed up new openings.

Meanwhile, cross border openings between Bangladesh and India without mentioning the word 'transit' or 'transshipment' continue to be articulated on a limited scale. Rail lines between the two countries have been re-linked at certain points

cargo has helped open up a new dimension in people-to-people contact between the two countries. The bus service has proved to be economic, and convenient. In the last two years, there have been no authenticated reports of increased smuggling or cross border trafficking centering the Dhaka-Calcutta bus service.

Tripura's plea's for an access to Bangladesh is quiet loud and clear. If passenger and goods could move to Dhaka from Calcutta why should they cannot move from Agartala to the Bangladesh capital? A long signed protocol for opening a direct Dhaka-Agartala bus service seems to be on hold for no reason.

Tripura state, located across Brahmanbaria, has historically remained interdependent and with linkages with Bangladesh. It is almost an enclave with Bangladesh on three of its sides. The state's capital Agartala is only seven kilometres away from Akhaura, an important railway junction while

four-fold if official channels are opened up, and full fledged customs stations are established. Several Bangladeshi products also continue to be smuggled into the Tripura markets which could find a stable and a more economic distribution system. Thus both sides are losing revenue. What is happening now is the reign of the smugglers.

Many feel that joint venture enterprises could be established by Bangladesh with Tripura which is rich in timber, many mineral resources and has a surplus rubber production. If Tripura is allowed a railroad access through transshipment, it would lead to increase in exports of both regions through value addition.

The traders of Tripura feel that if they could export their goods through the Chittagong port, Bangladesh would be receiving a substantial amount in railway charges, port charges besides transshipment fees.

from transit, transshipment or port charges. But what is the currency that the payments are going to be made by the users has never been said clearly. Nor it has been spelled out how much can be received as transshipment payment per vehicle or per container. These are essential statistics that have to be calculated in a transparent manner and placed before the Bangladesh parliament and people to arrive at a decision.

Bangladesh not only has to be compensated but it has to make a profit if we are to give access to our roads, railways and ports for use. Besides, these are all infrastructure facilities which would require maintenance and repair and it means calculating not only current costs but future burdens. All such modalities should have to be worked out and all payments should naturally have to be made in standard international currency, preferably dollars.

It must be remembered that from

OPINION

The colossus and his 6-point programme: We can barely forget

A H DEWAN

LIKE many of those who have lived through the Pakistani chapter and are still alive I have had also hugged a fond memory of having met in person the greatest Bengalee leader Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and heard him telling us, seated in front of him, of his strong passion and emotion for Bengalees, of his sole concern for the Bengalees and, of his nationalistic conception and messages that later became historical events. The occasion is still vivid in my memory.

It was sometime in 1965 after the war between Pakistan and India when I was a sophomore at Jagannath College, Dhaka. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, President of All Pakistan Awami League was busy, just out of jail as a political prisoner, reorganizing and revamping his party in the then East Pakistan, and as part of that, thana level leaders of AL including few of the Chhatra League activists of Dhaka Sadar South (Dohar & Nawabganj) were called in to see and hear him. The meeting was held in the premises of the shipping line business office of Nurul Islam Chowdhury (late, and the then treasurer of the party), which was just opposite the Gulistan Cinema building, now demolished; as I hailed from Dohar I was lucky to be included in the company without being a listed Chhatra League worker. The wide office floor was covered with white *chadar* and we all sat over at ease facing the leader who also sat likewise. He was in his customary attire of white Pjyama-Punjabi. He was also flanked by two

other great leaders of the four killed in jail, Tajuddin Ahmed and Syed Nazrul Islam. That was the moment of deliberation when the leader had spelled out that the Pakistani rulers had no concern for us, the Bengalees, who had been left totally abandoned and unshielded during the war. So with grim face he emphasized and pledged for the dire need of constitutional provisions for safety, security and prosperity of East Pakistanis with guarantee of full autonomy, more than what was enshrined in the Lahore Resolution of 1940. In that gathering, perhaps for the first time, he divulged to us that with the genius of some leading Bengalee economists and nationalists he had evolved a charter for salvation of the Bengalees, which later came to be popularly known as AL's 6-point programme. He also stated that he would officially announce his 'Bengalee Sanad' on the soil of West Pakistan knowing fully well that he would meet vehement onslaught from the Pakistani rulers and Pakistanis at large, but he was too firm and prepared for any eventualities.

Indomitable as he was, and imbued with the sublime cause and concern for the lot of Bengalees as to how it could be improved, he had declared his epoch-making 6-point programme in Lahore as he had told us earlier and the Pakistanis made no bones to brand him secessionist, and Field Marshal Ayub Khan, the then President of Pakistan, put him behind the bars. The 6-point programme in fact spearheaded all movements against exploitations of, and injustice to Bengalees of East

Pakistanite plea out by Pakistani rulers since inception of Pakistan in 1947. Manu Mia became the first victim of 6-point programme who fell prey to the Pakistani atrocity when countrywide hartal was being observed on 7th June 1996 to steer the 6-point programme. The later incidents that followed from June 1966 through March 1971 is known to all. But I cannot help citing another incident with 6-point having had a far-reaching bearing on the later movements.

To quash 6-point programme, Sheikh Mujib along with other few Bengalee senior bureaucrats and defence personnel were implicated in the trumped-up Agartala Conspiracy Case, and he was alleged to have engineered that against the State of Pakistan and was again incarcerated. Their trial began in the Dhaka Cantonment Cell. That stirred the movements against Pakistani junta and it gained countrywide momentum. The students of the then East Pakistan launched their 11-point programme (6-points merged therein) which culminated in the mass upsurge of 1969 when Asad and Matur fell to the bullets. East Pakistan blew up in rage and revolt. Maulana Bhashani, the eldest among the leaders and most venerated as a mentor, called upon all, "Break open the jail and programme in Lahore as he had told us earlier and the Pakistanis made no bones to brand him secessionist, and Field Marshal Ayub Khan, the then President of Pakistan, put him behind the bars. The 6-point programme in fact spearheaded all movements against exploitations of, and injustice to Bengalees of East

Political turmoils permeated through whole of Pakistan striking at the very composite of the government and in an attempt to bring them to an end, Ayub Khan called Round Table Conference (RTC) where heads of all political parties were invited. Advocate Abdus Salam, Ataur Rahman Khan, among others, from their respective parties from East Pakistan and Sheikh Mujib as President of All Pakistan Awami League joined the RTC. Sheikh Mujib would not betray with Manu Mia, Matur and Asad and so was he undaunted to place his 6-point programme before the RTC as the only *magna carta* for resolving the crisis and removing the sea of disparity that existed between the then East Pakistan and West Pakistan. He was made of such stuff not to yield to any patch-up solution sacrificing the interests of Bengalees. The parleys at RTC failed. I remember the veterans, Ataur Rahman Khan and Abdus Salam on return from Karachi while making statements before the journalists at Tajgaon Airport held Sheikh Mujib responsible for the failure that it was only due to intransigences of Sheikh Mujib with his 6-point ... so Mujib was more concerned about sharing his lot with the people of East Pakistan through nothing short of full autonomy for East Pakistan as propounded in his 6-point programme and constitutional guarantee for 'no more exploitation by Pakistanis'.

So was Sheikh Mujib who thought for Bengalees, fought for the legitimate rights and privileges of Bengalees, and with 167 out of 169 National Assembly seats won

by his AL in East Pakistan in the General Elections of 1970 when his aspirations with the Bengalees giving him mandate of his/AL's 6-point were hatched to thwart, he called upon all Bengalees, through his historic speech of 7th March to get prepared to resist Pakistanis with whatever means they had; he having concluded his speech with, "the struggle this time is for freedom, the struggle this time is for emancipation". All East Pakistanis got the clear signal and got him as their absolutely undisputed leader to achieve their ends. Pakistanis being wary of Bengalees' ultimate aim of separating from Pakistan sat with Sheikh Mujib and other AL leaders. But his grueling meeting and discussion with the Pakistani military junta and other West Pakistani leaders on framing of future Constitution on the very basis of his 6-point programme was brought to a fiasco by the Pakistanis who smelt of contretemps for Pakistan if abided by the 6-point; he was again taken into captivity and flown into Pakistan to condemn him to death on charges of dismembering Pakistan, and that ultimately led the whole of Bengalee nationals to wage war of liberation against the Pakistanis. And Bengalees fought their war in the name of their leader, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and with moral, material and logistic support and succour of India, got their homeland liberated as an independent Bangladesh. In fact Sheikh Mujib's brain child 6-point programme played the pivotal role in forging the Bengalees ahead with movements and finally with war that eventually led to give birth to

their nation and so was Sheikh Mujib rightly called 'the architect of Bangladesh', undisputedly as well.

A new generation has been taught to belittle the unparalleled contribution of Sheikh Mujib in carving out this Bangladesh and so we find them go wild and commit sacrilegious of his portrait. And the BNP government in order to bring their late leader to the fore and limelight shamelessly plunged into dishonoring the architect of Bangladesh also by evading in the text books incorporation of the facts (like 6-point programme, Agartala Conspiracy Case) and phenomena of Sheikh Mujib's leadership in the birth of this nation, and are stifling us and the media not to utter his name even on the nation's most glorious days like Independence and Victory Days. Their late leader Ziaur Rahman has his esteemed and envious place in the history of our glorious liberation war but attempting to bring him at par with Sheikh Mujib is simply unwise, elusive and an exercise in futility. Sheikh Mujib was not the leader to whom greatness was thrust upon; he earned greatness by toils, trials and tribulations, he had suffered for long 24 years for his countrymen. The more they will try to keep his name unsaid and unsung, the more he will be adored by the Bengalees who got their separate identity and entity by virtue of no other than Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Hawa Bhaban

I have gone through the news titled "Reshuffle scare in jumbo cabinet" (May 20). I found, Hawa Bhaban is creating undue interference in the affairs of the government. It seems that Hawa Bhaban is behaving like a trade union. I am shocked after reading "It was reliably learnt that the Hawa Bhaban is rigid about Babar's continuation with the Home Ministry no matter who comes to head it. Babar is often blamed for bossing the Home Minister."

If a state minister is bossing the cabinet minister, then where is the chain of command? And how the Home Ministry would maintain the law and order situation of the country? I urge our PM to stop the trade union like undue activities of Hawa Bhaban for the better interest of the government as well as the whole nation.

M. S. Uddin
Nagoya, Japan

Liquor licence

The news in the BBC website of June 4 was, "Bangladesh grants private liquor licence".

(http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/12622883.stm)

usiness/newsid_2022000/2022883.stm)

The report goes on to say that Jamuna Group has been given a licence to brew and sell beer, whiskey and gin both for the local market and export. But wasn't it the past so-called 'secular' AL that had given this permission?

Anyway at least no one's going to be accusing us of being Taliban's now!

I for one am very happy to see this news. The Banani Bazaar market is a deadly place and legally accessible liquor will save many lives.

MA
Dhaka

David fights Goliath

It is madness on the part of Gen. Pervez Mushraff of Pakistan to take on India. Indian defence is far stronger compared to Pakistani forces. Should Pakistan choose to use its nuclear options while India has the might to wipe Pakistan out from the world map?

I wish saner minds will prevail and peace will be restored.

MAHMAD
Dhaka

Imported sugar: bitter sweet?

This year Bangladesh is going to be importing tons of sugar through international tenders. One of the conditions of the tenders is that the ICUMSA of the sugar may be up to 150 per cent. ICUMSA rating is an international unit for expressing the purity of the sugar in solution. Higher the percentage of ICUMSA, lower the quality of sugar; in other words, less the ICUMSA, higher the quality. Most of the countries and no developed country accept ICUMSA higher than 45 per cent. As far I know, even India, our neighbouring country, does not allow ICUMSA more than 60 per cent. Why 150 per cent ICUMSA is acceptable to our government?

There is a rumour in the international sugar market that a supplier is going to sell sugar to Bangladesh, which may be old, with low quality ICUMSA, and possibly he may have reprocessed this old sugar to sell it to us. We would like to request our concerned government department to investigate this matter.

We Bangladesh people as well as our government enjoy a lot importing foreign goods. Tomato, onion, fish, mango, yarn, fabric,

chocolate, nothing escapes our spree to import. We import sugar because our age-old sugar mills can not meet our demand. Through introducing modern technology in the existing sugar mills, quantity of sugar production from per ton of sugar cane can be increased. But who cares? After all those are state owned mills.

Faruque Hasan
Dhanmandi, Dhaka

Habigonj-Hiala Road

The only Road from Habigonj to Ikram via Hiala was started during the past Awami League government and brick soiling was done up to village Kabilpur by the LGED Habigonj. But for some unknown reasons the work suddenly stopped. As a result the rest of Hiala and Ikram Road works left unfinished, which has become quite unusable for the pedestrians. People suffer a lot, as they have to walk on the muddy and slippery road from Kabilpur to Hiala and Ikram.

This may be noted that the low lying areas comprising Hiala, Makrampur, Sangor, Ikram, Agua-Kaurkandi, pallakandi, etc. are the worst affected and are deprived of any sort of development work. We

ask the concerned local govt. authorities to please do the needful and save the suffering people of the locality.

Syed Rofiqul Hussain
Hiala Saheb Bari, Habigonj

"Synonym in BUET"

This refers to Dr. Abu L. Haque's letter captioned "Synonym in BUET" (June 1) and also to the letter on the same subject written by a former student of English Department, Dhaka University (May 17).

In this connection I want to point out the following two things:

1) Two words Engineering and Technology are not synonyms. They have similar connotations but they are not identical and can't be used interchangeably. Technology is proven engineering and application of engineering. The technology is the "state of the arts", whereas engineering is creative and a fundamental branch of human endeavour.

Engineers bring dreams and ideas into reality. The engineer is educated to be a creative thinker. The technologist is educated for the "here and now" and to be immediately productive. The technologist applies "state of the arts" to the solution of routine problems often freeing engineers for more creative

activities.

American Board of Engineering and Technology (ABET) that accredits engineering, technology and applied science programs and promotes quality and innovation in engineering, technology and applied science education has clearly differentiated the fine line between engineering and technology.

I am not familiar with the academic programs at BUET. I am quite familiar with the engineering education in USA. Quite a number US universities have separate undergraduate programs in engineering (BS in Engineering) and Technology (BS in Engineering Technology). For a complete list of these programs please see ABET web site www.abet.org.

As per naming of BUET I think there is nothing superfluous or ambiguous in it. We don't have to follow America as our role model in every sphere of our personal, social and national life. I can cite at least 50 names of educational institutions world over with "Engineering and Technology" in it.

Here are two examples from USA:

1) Indiana University Purdue School of Engineering and Technology (<http://www.engr.iupui.edu/>)

ii) Brigham Young University College of Engineering and Technology (<http://www.et.byu.edu/sot/>)

Ahmed K. Rashid
Azimpur Road, Dhaka

Meeting the local demand on gas: Are we on the right track?

Unexpectedly known but it was quite irritating that I came to know baby taxis (a good number of them) had been using gas-running engines and there were separate stations only for gas-using taxicabs, baby-taxis, buses etc.

The matter came when the driver at one point of Mohakhali told me that he needed gas and that's why he wants to go through Farmgate towards my residence at Purana Palltan. At first, didn't get it but ultimately it reached a filling station where along with gas fill-up some other things had been even going on. At a corner of the station I noticed a white Pajero and a man who was stopping every vehicle and checking something and collecting some information. My driver informed me that I have to get down because his vehicle would be checked. When I got down I was quite astonished to see a gas cylinder inside the backseat.

Later I came to know that under a joint venture of Bangladesh and Canada a good number of baby-taxis came under gas use. According to the driver this will help to reduce the transport cost to a great extent in the near future. Although the information was known to me much later but it was quite evident that the issue of gas exports was the much talked about issue in the national level today. The objective of pointing out this incident is to give a small hint to our policy-makers about the correct estimation of our local demand.

Everyday lots of discussions have been going on in the national level as well as in the private sector over the issue of gas export. But very little emphasis had been given on the various forms of alternative uses. Estimation of local demand can be much higher than the projected one if our own gas could be used in the above way and others. And in decisions like withdrawing old baby-taxis in a quick manner (which caused much harassment for the middle-class families), application of efficient use of gas can reduce many such problems in various sectors.

Econ., On e-mail